

GENERAL RECORDS SCHEDULE 20

DATA AUTOMATION PROGRAM RECORDS

This schedule covers machine readable records recorded on erasable media, related documentation required for their servicing, and files related to the ADP operations, procurement and management function.

This schedule covers the principal categories of machine readable and supporting records that are common to several or all agencies. For purposes of this schedule, they have been divided into four categories which roughly correspond to the typical organization structure found in most ADP installations and their parent organizations.

Data automation planning and operational records are normally those created during the life cycle of individual computer models. They deal with planning, managing, procurement, selection, utilization and accountability for ADP systems and supporting activities.

Documentation required for servicing machine readable records covers the organized series of descriptive documents required to develop, operate and maintain ADP systems. These include system specifications, test data and procedures, file and user documentation and the various installation procedures and standards used in daily operations.

The term magnetic media refers to all devices which store data in an erasable mode. At present, only magnetic media are commonly used for such purposes. However, other technologies may in the future have the same characteristics now present on magnetic tape. These are non-volatility combined with the characteristic of easy reusability.

Since magnetic media can be overwritten, a variety of protective devices and techniques have been developed over the years to insure that no inadvertent erasure of records takes place. The earliest technique is still in use and consists of a write protection ring inserted or left out of a reel of tape. This is a mechanical interlock device and is now a standard technique. With the development of operating systems, additional safeguards have been developed. This technique is software oriented and consists of writing file identification and expiration date fields on a label record at the beginning of each reel of tape. Other magnetic media such as disks depend solely on such software protection.

Most ADP installations use machine readable media other than magnetic for a variety of roles and functions. Part IV of this schedule covers the most common functions of card decks. For the most part, these are of temporary or backup use in developing software. However, punched cards in many cases are used as documents themselves. Typical examples are checks, U.S. savings bonds, some requisition forms, etc. In these cases, the overriding criterion is the fact that the card is a document and the retention period should be determined on the basis of other record schedules developed specifically for that function.

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It follows that all tape expiration dates must be developed at the time of the original system design. Part III of this schedule represents current good practice in this area.

Unlike paperwork systems, most computer applications create many copies of a given record between the point of original entry of the system until the record emerges on the output side as part of a file, a total, or another transaction to another system. Prudent management of resources requires that the bulk of magnetic tape copies should be erased as soon as possible when they are no longer required for operational or backup purposes.

However, some files of records have values above and beyond their convenience value and should be retained for longer periods of time. For example, some transaction tapes may have value in furnishing audit trails. Since many systems are becoming more automated when newer ADP equipment is procured, certain manual controls may be dropped. Since many applications are dynamic and change frequently due to corresponding changes in legislation or other factors, programs which are no longer used may have to be kept for site audit records.

A variety of criteria enter into the appraisal of ADP records and their associated documentation. Part V of this schedule is intended to be a guideline for records officers, auditors and archivists in determining which tapes might profitably be retained for these other purposes.

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